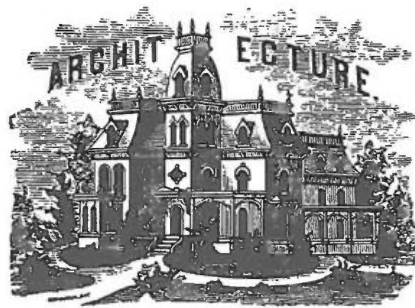


A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



William A. Goodwin
1822-1896

The social vision and design legacy of William A. Goodwin remain in the three public parks laid out during his service as Portland's City Civil Engineer. In 1878 Goodwin prepared plans for the Eastern and Western Promenades; the following year he laid out Deering Oaks. The surviving framework of Deering Oaks and the Eastern and Western Promenades is largely the result of Goodwin's efforts during his tenure as City Engineer.

Goodwin was born in Saco, Maine, on July 22, 1822, the son of Dr. James and Hannah Gookin Goodwin. He attended Saco Academy and graduated from Bowdoin in 1843. After finishing college Goodwin taught school for two years and in 1846 began studying civil engineering "in the field". He worked as an assistant for the Atlantic and St. Lawrence Railroad for eight

years. Following that, he was the chief engineer of several railroad lines, for which he surveyed and laid out track.

In 1857 Goodwin left railroad work to become Clerk of the Works for the U.S. Lighthouse Service in the 1st District, Coast of Maine. In this capacity he was in charge of coordinating and reporting on construction and repair projects. From 1861 to 1867 he was Acting Engineer of the 1st and 2nd Lighthouse Districts, which included the Coasts of Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. During the Civil War, under special orders from the Lighthouse Service, Goodwin was stationed in New Orleans to cover the Gulf and South Atlantic Coasts. During his tenure in the Lighthouse Service, he prepared "as built" drawings for the existing Goat Island Light Station off Cape Porpoise. He also made a plan for the Halfway Rock Light Station off South Harpswell, which was not constructed. Goodwin's appointment appears to have ended in the fall of 1868, and his successor, L. C. Duane, prepared a new design for Halfway Rock that was built and survives today.¹

From 1872 to 1892 Goodwin served as Portland's City Civil Engineer.² In this position he was charged with maintaining and improving the city's streets and public grounds. When Goodwin came into office in 1872, the city-owned public grounds included parcels of land on the Eastern and Western Promenades and Lincoln Park.

In 1828 Portland had secured a twelve acre site on Munjoy Hill which offered extensive views of the harbor and Casco Bay. The first parcels to be acquired along the Western Promenade were purchased by the city in 1836. Improvements to the Promenades began in 1837 and included grading, filling, constructing a road, and planting trees. In 1836 a local newspaper reported that "...the western end of the City is to be ornamented... A drive is to be constructed from Bramhall's Hill over to Vaughan's Bridge in a similar style of magnificence (to the Eastern Promenade)."³ On June 3, 1837, the City advertised for proposals to construct a road, "40 feet wide around Mount Joy..."⁴ The 1876 Bird's Eye View of Portland, which shows a drive lined with trees, gives a good idea of the condition of the Promenades just prior to Goodwin's improvements (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Bird's Eye View of Portland, 1876 (MHPC).

In 1878 Calvert Vaux, a New York architect formerly in partnership with Andrew Jackson Downing and Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., was invited by Mayor Butler to come to Portland and advise the city regarding the improvement of its public grounds.⁵ Vaux spent two days with Goodwin making suggestions. After this meeting Goodwin reported that:

It does not require an expert to show us that from whatever direction we enter either of the Promenades, it begins at nothing noticeable throughout. The outlook is grandly beautiful; the foreground contemptible, the trees few and unsightly, devoted in their early infancy to the attrition of cows and the tethering of goats without compensating allowances thereafter. Such grounds should have an approach commensurate with the value of the outlook.⁶

Shortly after this meeting with Vaux, Goodwin delivered a paper entitled "Our Public Grounds" to the Fraternity Club of Portland. In this talk he presented plans for improvements to the Eastern and Western Promenades. Goodwin's introduction offers insight into his view of the importance of public grounds:

Little has been done for the improvement of our advantages of situation, for encouragement of open-air exercise, and for social out-of-door intercourse, those prime motors of public cheerfulness. Our streets are attractive, but they are for many of us only thoroughfares between our homes and our posts of duty, and so we turn for recreation to our "high places", where are revealed distance prospects unrivaled in variety of grandeur and beauty.⁷

Goodwin's plan for the Eastern Promenade has not survived. However, the design intent and progress of the work is described in detail in the City Civil Engineer's *Annual Reports*. The 1879-80 *Annual Report* noted

that work on the Eastern Promenade had begun:

The general plan for the improvement consists mainly, for the present, in locating the driveway on the plot between the row of trees, where it was originally intended to be, and in making an esplanade or grass-plot on the site of the present roadway along the sidewalk, which will skirt the upper side line of the promenade.

In 1881 Goodwin reported that "a curved driveway, diverging from the central drive near the foot of Quebec Street and coming in again at the foot of Melbourne Street has been laid out and planted with trees on both sides, but not yet graded. Its motive is to relieve the straight drive by a detour, at the same time breaking the monotony of the straight line of trees." The following excerpts describing the creation of the Machigonne Monument site at the foot of Congress Street illustrate Goodwin's ability to combine functional and aesthetic concerns as well as to provide artistically designed spaces. In this case, he created a terminus to the view down Congress Street from an unsightly dump and provided an aesthetic foreground for viewing the bay:

Work has begun in an inexpensive way by the erection of a circular mound of fifty-five feet diameter and four feet high, with turfed sides, adjoining the driveway at the foot of Congress Street. Around this has been carried a narrow branch of the drive which it is designed to extend to the width of thirty feet. A length of one hundred and sixty lineal feet of driveway has also been graded. The mound is composed of the heaps of ashes and other rubbish which have heretofore been illegally deposited on this public way, and with the material taken from the widening of Congress Street, and top soil from Morning Street location. The mound is not much in itself, but at once suggests a statue or a monument as a worthy feature of the foreground of the superb view which the site affords.

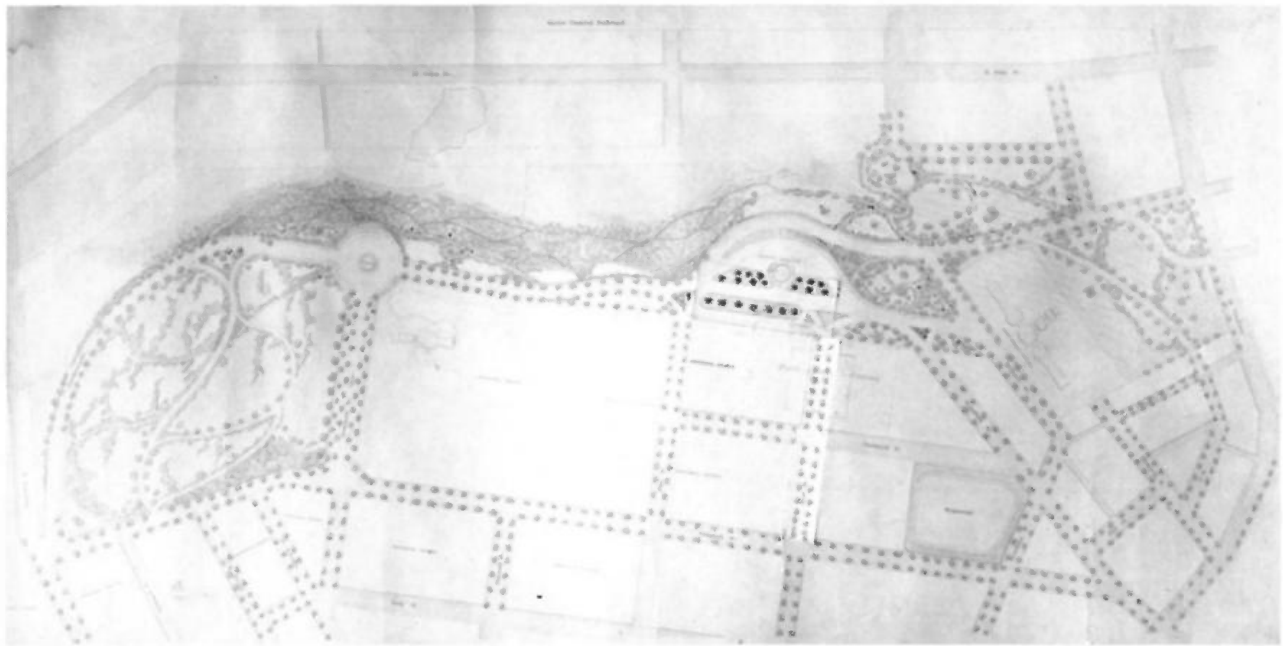


Figure 2: Western Promenade Proposal, circa 1879 (Courtesy of Public Works Department, City of Portland).

The improvements effected at this point which afford one of our finest views of the bay, though not yet completed as designed, is still worthy of note. At the time of pursuance of Promenade improvements in the year 1879 the site of the monument was covered with heaps of ashes and refuse, to the amount of nearly two hundred cubic yards. These were gathered in a circular mound and covered with a coating of loam and turfed around the slope, at an expense not greater than would have attended the removal of the ashes to the city dump.⁸

In 1884 the Parks Department reported that a granite monument commemorating the first settlers of Machigonne Neck had been erected on the mound in the Promenade at the foot of Congress Street and encircled with an iron fence.

Concurrent with the Eastern Promenade work, improvements were being made to the Western Promenade. In 1878 Goodwin described the approach to the Western Promenade as "...rougher and more uncouth than any piece of country road you will find within 10 miles of Portland. The Promenade is 2,100 feet in length from Bowdoin Street to Arsenal Street. Upon this there are no improvements except that Mr. (J.B.) Brown has set out and cared for good trees along the sidewalk."⁹ In addition to grading, filling, and planting trees, shrubs, and grass, Goodwin proposed that in order to remedy the rough uncouth approaches to the Promenade that Danforth, Bowdoin, and West Streets be widened, leveled, and planted with a double row of trees. He also suggested that the Western Cemetery would soon be abandoned and that it could be utilized as a ramble. Goodwin, realistic about the municipal budget for park improvements, suggested that "the work can never be wholly finished. But it can be begun in a small way and carried on gradually as the City is able." An undated and unsigned plan of the Western Promenade which corresponds to Goodwin's description survives in the Portland Public Works drawing collection (Figure 2). In order to improve the condi-

tion of the Promenades, an appropriation of \$1,000 was made by the City Council on October 7, 1878. The Western Promenade required tremendous amounts of fill, grading, and planting. Goodwin concluded his 1879 Annual Report by stating that "the Promenade is a bleak place; carefulness and respect for public improvement are not characteristics of some of our people, and eternal vigilance will be the price of flourishing trees in any of our unfenced public grounds."

The design of Deering Oaks is Goodwin's major contribution to Portland's Park System (Figure 3). At this site Goodwin had the opportunity to start with unimproved ground and express his own design ideas. In 1879 when the fifty acre Deering Oaks was deeded to the city, Goodwin reported:

It is expected that in the not far distant future, the grounds will be laid out into a park...which will be not only ornamental but healthful, where our citizens will spend many pleasant hours in health deriving exercises and though leaves have their time to fall and flowers to wither, still, may those brave old oaks be spared the woodman's axe and grow and thrive to show the wisdom of purchase.¹⁰

Goodwin's design for Deering Oaks was in the picturesque and naturalistic style, incorporating a major formal element along the northern boundary. The existing stately oaks provided the skeletal structure of the design. The secondary structure was created by the addition of mixed hardwoods, evergreens, and shrubbery. Goodwin wrote that "the crowning glory of the Oaks will always be the breezy dome of the old woods, to which elms and beeches and birches, the maples and evergreens and shrubbery can never be much more than ornamental fringing."¹¹ The southern and western boundaries followed the orthogonal city street pattern. Here Goodwin proposed a row of border trees flanking the perimeter walk. Along the irregular eastern boundary a more naturalistic walk was intro-

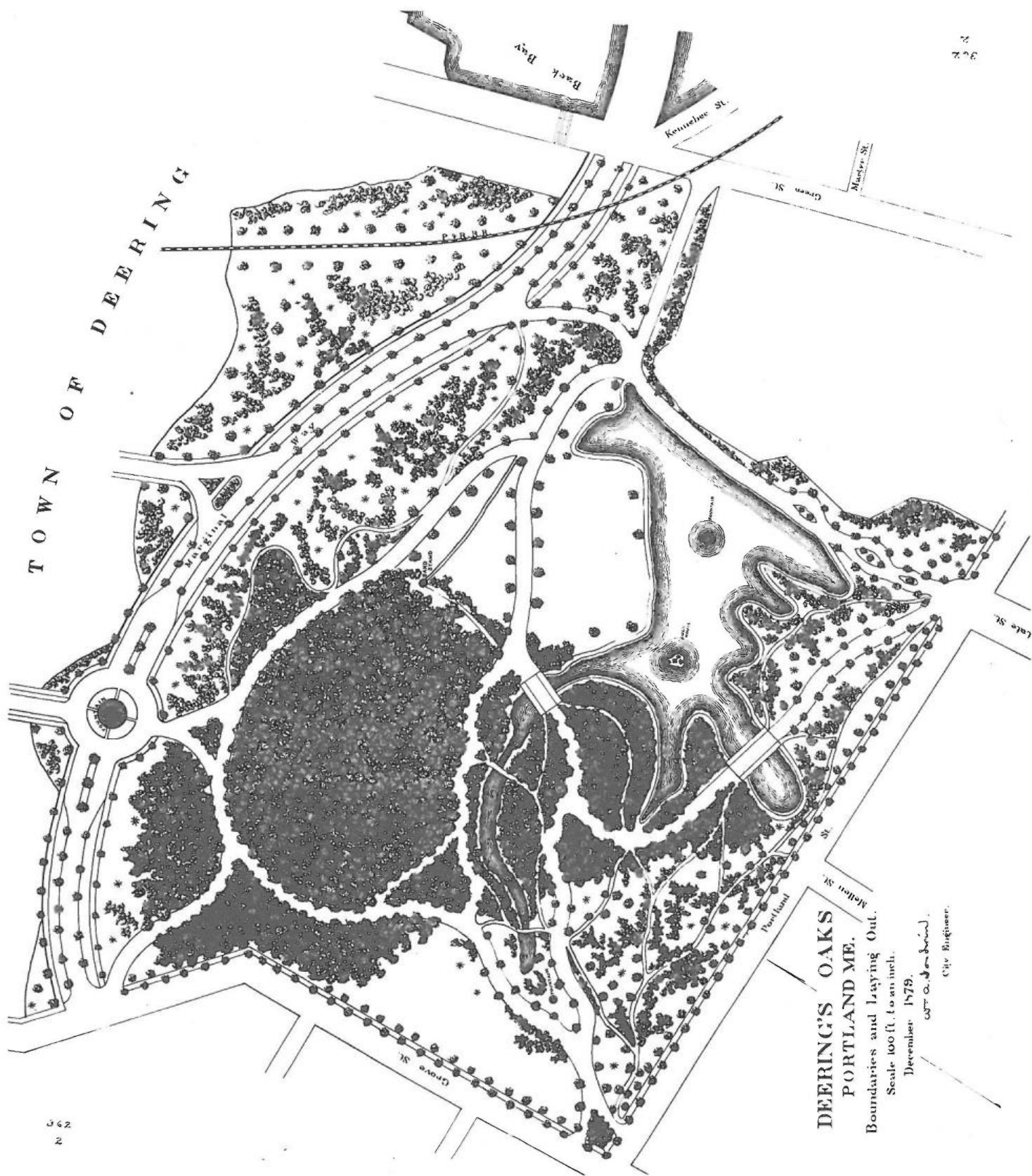


Figure 3. Deering Oaks Proposal, 1879 (Courtesy of Public Works Department, City of Portland).

duced in keeping with the situation. "Marginal Way", the northern boundary of the park, was defined by a formal curved drive bordered by trees with a fountain proposed at the intersection of the internal path system. A drive with major gateways was recommended for the east and west entrances. Within the boundaries Goodwin proposed a curvilinear path system through wooded and open areas. A major element of the plan was to create a pond in the southeast corner of the park. A duck house located on an island and a fountain were to be focal points of the pond. Two bridges were proposed along the pond walk. The location of a bandstand was indicated in an open area to the northwest of the park.

Designed primarily to create a pastoral setting around the pond with an open greensward surrounded by a grove of oaks, the layout of Deering Oaks incorporates many principles associated with the prominent landscape architects of the latter half of the nineteenth century.¹² Like many of his fellow park designers, Goodwin viewed the public park as a powerful antidote to the stresses of urban life. Goodwin employed a number of design devices to accomplish this. The curved, rambling paths not only contrasted with the city street grid pattern but gave the feeling of an enlarged sense of space and often times an element of surprise. The irregular edge of the pond with the headlands and bays has the same effect; it takes the eye longer to travel around the edge of the pond, again with some element of surprise because the whole cannot be taken in at one glance. Goodwin's attention to detail was apparent in his concern about the extension of the pond's retaining wall along the southern bank because it did "...not compare in symmetry of appearance with the greensward coming down to the water's edge, fringed at salient points with willows and other waterside trees and shrubs."¹³ Like many park designers, Goodwin was concerned with sanitation and drainage considerations in reclaiming polluted lands. Parks, he felt, were not simply superficial arrangements but necessary urban features to promote both the physical and mental health of city dwellers.

Historic views of the park and a 1905 drawing prepared by the Olmsted Brothers indicates that much of Goodwin's design was implemented. Major elements that appear not to have been executed include border trees along Portland and Grove Streets and the completion of the formal east-west drive at the northern boundary of the park.

As with many of his contemporary planners, Goodwin's practical knowledge of civil engineering and surveying was coupled with prevailing societal concerns for publicly supported open space. In 1879 he wrote, "the magnificent area of fifty acres comprising Deering Oaks, and the greater part of the adjacent meadow on the northerly side of the woods...for years to come will demand the best thought of our citizens." He insisted on an immediate and careful inspection of all of the trees and said, "No trees should be cut even in trimming without deep sense of responsibility

and earnest conviction of necessity." Goodwin also encouraged the City to acquire the property abutting the park to the southeast which housed a tannery, pork factory, and slaughter house. Goodwin's vision extended to proposing a park system by developing links between Deering Oaks and the Eastern and Western Promenades. In this regard, he wrote, "the circuit of our public grounds, beginning with either Promenade and thence passing through our shaded streets and the Oaks to the other Promenade, affords a variety and a natural beauty of scenery to be found in but a few cities of this country. The foreground of these several landscapes and marine views will doubtless be cared for little by little as the means of the city will warrant."¹⁴

In 1905 the Olmsted Brothers' landscape architecture firm from Brookline, Massachusetts, was hired to prepare a plan for the Portland Park System, a proposal that would connect, through a series of boulevards, the Eastern and Western Promenades, Deering Oaks, and Back Cove. The plan also included improvements for the individual parks. Few of the Olmsted proposals were implemented, and the appearance of the Eastern and Western Promenades and Deering Oaks is largely the work of William Goodwin.

Because there was no formal training for landscape architects until Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. established the first program at Harvard in 1900, landscape designers drew their experience from a variety of sources. Many like Goodwin were trained in civil engineering. In addition to formal training, these early landscape designers were "generalists" embracing a breath of environmental, social, and democratic ideals. Goodwin was certainly in this mold of late nineteenth century landscape designers.

During his public career, William A. Goodwin attempted to improve the quality of life for Portland's citizens. In addition to his landscaping accomplishments, he produced in 1882 a remarkable atlas of eighty-two maps of the city which accurately delineate every street and building on the peninsula. In the following quote from Goodwin's 1896 obituary, one is reminded of Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.'s similar expression of the importance of "communicativeness", a sense of shared community and dedicated service:¹⁵

Goodwin served as City Engineer with a skill of permanent advantage to the public — all the while serving with fidelity and the most marked acceptance — he with commendable sincerity and grace, shared the credit accorded to the work of the office with his subordinate associates. A most natural outcome of a generous heart, sweet temper and a disposition charitable to all, especially emphasized by a remark of an every day associate for twenty years "that he never heard any man speak an ill word of him, nor ever heard him speak an ill word of any man." In his social and neighborhood life there was always delightful harmony and in his home a perpetual charm too fine for descriptive words. There are many who have known the rare quality of his mind and will dwell with pleasure in memory of his valuable acquirements and special gifts.¹⁶



Figure 4. Deering Oaks Pond, circa 1885 view (Courtesy of Francis M. O'Brien).

NOTES

- ¹ Biographical information from Obituary, *Portland Daily Press*, March 23, 1896.
- ² During this period Goodwin also worked in private practice. In 1881 he designed a cottage development for Fryeburg in association with the Portland architect Charles H. Kimball. See *Portland Daily Press*, November 15, 1881.
- ³ *Eastern Argus*, July 13, 1836.
- ⁴ *Eastern Argus*, June 13, 1837.
- ⁵ Calvert Vaux's visit is referenced in "Our Public Grounds", a talk given by Goodwin to the Fraternity Club, Maine Historical Society Collection. It was also reported in the *Portland Daily Press*, August 6, 1878: "Mr. Calvert Vaux of New York, a landscape engineer, is in town on invitation of Mayor Butler looking over our promenades with a view to furnish plans for their improvement."
- ⁶ "Our Public Grounds", paper delivered to the Fraternity Club, December 2, 1878, Maine Historical Society Collection.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ *Auditor's Annual Report of the Receipts and Expenditures of the City of Portland for the Financial Year 1877-78.*
- ⁹ "Our Public Grounds".
- ¹⁰ *Auditor's Annual Report*, 1879-80.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² Beveridge, Charles E. "Who was Olmsted?", *Maine Olmsted Alliance for Parks and Landscapes Newsletter*, March, 1990, p. 1.
- ¹³ *Auditor's Annual Report*, 1881-82.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵ As defined by Laura Roper, "Communicativeness involved recognizing, and acting consistently on the recognition, that one had an essential community of interest with other human beings, regardless of regional, class, economic, color, religious, or whatever differences." Laura Wood Roper. *FLO: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted*, Baltimore, 1973, p. xiv.
- ¹⁶ Obituary, *Portland Daily Press*, March 23, 1896.

LIST OF KNOWN LANDSCAPE DESIGNS IN MAINE BY WILLIAM A. GOODWIN

Deering Oaks Park, Portland, 1879, Extant
 Eastern Promenade (Improvements), Portland, 1879-1892, Extant
 Western Promenade (Improvements), 1879-1892, Extant
 Prospect Highlands Development (with Charles H. Kimball, Architect), Fryeburg, 1881, Probably Not Executed

LANDSCAPE DRAWINGS

The Public Works Department, City of Portland, has several drawings which were proposed or executed during Goodwin's tenure as City Engineer. These drawings have his stamp and, in some cases, are in his handwriting.

Photograph of William A. Goodwin
 Courtesy of William B. Jordan, Jr.

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